

So, with that, I urge all of my colleagues to support the motion to proceed and final passage.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, later today or tomorrow, as part of the American Rescue Plan, which we will be discussing in the next few days, which I happen to believe is the most significant piece of legislation to come to the floor of the Senate in decades in terms of addressing the crises facing working families—as part of that piece of legislation, I will be offering an amendment to raise the Federal minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour, which I believe is a starvation wage, to \$15 an hour over a 5-year period—5 years.

I think there has been some miscommunication around here, and there are people who are saying it is going from 7.25 to 15 bucks an hour in 1 year. Not true. It goes from 7.25 to 9.50, to 11, to 12.50, to 14, to 15 dollars an hour. So anyone who says we are raising the minimum wage in 1 year, in the midst of a pandemic, to \$15 an hour is simply not telling the truth.

This amendment is similar to a bill which I have brought forth, the Raise the Wage Act, which I am proud to say has been cosponsored by some 38 Members of the Senate, and this is also similar to legislation which has already passed the U.S. House of Representatives. And I thank them, and I thank my friends in the Progressive Caucus in the House for doing a great job in pushing this legislation.

I should also add, for my Senate colleagues, that this legislation raising the minimum wage is supported by some 300 national organizations, including the 12 million members of the AFL-CIO and virtually every major union in this country. This is something that unions like the SEIU, one of the largest unions in this country, have been fighting for, for a very long time.

I should also add here that while raising the minimum wage is going to impact every low-wage worker in this country—because African-American and Latino workers often are earning poverty wages—it significantly impacts the lives of the minority communities as well. That is why, among so many other organizations supporting this amendment, it is supported by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; it is supported by the National Organization for Women because, again, when we talk about low-wage workers, we are talking about the minority community, we are talking

about women; and that is why it is supported by groups like Unidos, the American Association of University Women, Indivisible, Justice for Migrant Women, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and the National Women's Law Center.

So, once again, this is legislation that will increase wages for 30 million American workers. And if you ask me what the great economic crisis in our country is today, it is not just high unemployment; it is not just income and wealth inequality; it is that half of our people today, and before the pandemic, were living paycheck to paycheck. Their wages were so low that if they had a problem with their car or their kid got sick, suddenly they were in financial crisis.

And in the richest country in the history of the world, half of our people should not be facing economic desperation when their car breaks down. The reason for that is, significantly, that many millions of workers are earning starvation wages—and I underline that, starvation wages—in this country.

I would love to hear anybody get up here and tell me that they could live on seven and a quarter an hour, they could live on 8 bucks an hour, they could live on 9 bucks an hour. You can't. And I have been all over this country, and I have talked to workers who are making 10, 11 bucks an hour, with tears streaming down their cheeks, telling me what it is like to work for starvation wages and try to raise your kids.

So the time is long overdue. The last time this Congress passed an increase in the minimum wage was in the year 2007—2007. It is time to raise the minimum wage. It is time to raise the minimum wage to a living wage of 15 bucks an hour.

Now, later on today or this evening, as part of my support for this enormously important piece of legislation—and, as chairman of the Budget Committee, I will be speaking more about why we need to raise the minimum wage, but I want to focus on one part of the minimum wage bill that I have been hearing a little bit about in the last couple of days from some of my colleagues, and that is the provision to raise the tipped wage.

Now, the tipped wage, so everybody understands it, is the Federal minimum wage that applies to waiters and waitresses, barbers, hair stylists, parking attendants, and others. Fellow Americans, do you know what that Federal minimum wage today is for that person who waits on your table at a restaurant? It is \$2.12 an hour. Yeah, you heard me correctly: \$2.12 an hour.

And the proposal, as part of the minimum wage bill, the amendment that I will be offering, is that tipped minimum wage would go up from \$2.12 an hour to \$14.95 over a 7-year period, longer than the overall national minimum wage would go up. And this is something that clearly is desperately needed.

Now, I know that, here in Washington, anytime we bring forth serious and important legislation for working people, the Big Money interests get to work, and all of their lobbyists, who make their six figures or seven figures a year, they get to work on Congress and tell you why you can't do anything to protect the most vulnerable and hard-hit people in this country.

So the National Restaurant Association, they are a very powerful lobbying organization. I guess they have been enormously successful because we have not raised the Federal minimum wage since 2007. So the powerful lobbying organizations are going around, and they are telling Members of the House and the Senate that raising the tipped wage is opposed by restaurant workers and it would be harmful to the interest of waiters and waitresses and other people.

That is not true. That is what lobbyists say, representing Big Money interests. That is what they are paid to say, but that is not what workers who wait on tables are telling us.

One Fair Wage, a grassroots organization representing service employees—waiters, waitresses, and others—has just delivered to the White House a petition with 140,000 signatures on it from service workers who are demanding that they receive the same minimum wage as every other worker in this country. And polling among service employees and nonservice employees also supports the reality that Americans want our waiters and our waitresses and other service employees to get a fair and equal minimum wage, similar to what other low-wage workers are receiving.

Now, I have heard from some who tell me that people who are waiting on tables—and, by the way, I was one of the worst waiters in the history of the country, but I was a waiter a long time ago. I know a little bit about it. I am hearing from some that waiters and waitresses, they are doing really well, making a whole lot of money, and they don't need an increase in the minimum wage.

Let's be clear. When you talk about the restaurant and the hotel industry, you are talking about mass discrepancies in the kind of incomes that people receive. I will not deny it for a second. My daughter worked in a fancy restaurant. She did quite well.

So if you are working in a hotel in a fancy restaurant where you have a menu that is quite expensive—you have got a \$100 meal and your 20 percent is 20 bucks, you are waiting on three or four tables—you are doing OK. I don't deny that for a second, and I wish those waiters and waitresses who work so hard continued success.

But let us be clear. Not everybody works in a fancy restaurant or a big hotel which has a high-priced menu. You have got a whole lot of people working in diners, working in working-class restaurants where the menu is not that fancy, and maybe it is \$10 for

lunch or \$8 for lunch. Twenty percent of that is \$1.60, on an \$8 meal.

Let us be very clear that, when we talk about waiters and waitresses, some 70 percent of tipped workers in this country are women, who suffer from three times the poverty rate of the rest of the U.S. workforce. In other words, women who are waitressing have a three times higher poverty rate than the rest of the U.S. workforce. Their tips are not keeping up with their needs. These women waitresses use food stamps at double the rate of other workers in this country.

And, importantly, and increasingly so—amazingly, during this pandemic—waitresses suffer from the highest rates of sexual harassment of workers in any industry because they are forced to tolerate inappropriate customer behavior to feed their families through the tips that they get.

We are hearing stories where people in a restaurant, guys in a restaurant say: Well, take your mask off. You want a tip; let me see how you look.

And, clearly, this is unacceptable behavior.

I also want to point out that the idea of moving tip wages to the same level over a period—in this case, 7 years—moving it to the same level as the overall minimum wage is not a radical idea. It ain't a Bernie Sanders idea. It already exists. I don't know if people know this. It already exists in seven States. So in seven States, right now, people who work in the service industry—waiters, waitresses, and others—are getting the same minimum wage as all the workers in those States. And those States are California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Montana, Alaska, and Minnesota. Seven States already pay their service industry workers the same wages as they pay other minimum-wage workers.

And I should point out that all of these States experienced a growth in the number of small businesses and restaurants after they abolished the tip minimum wage. So they abolished the tip minimum wage; it did not drive restaurants out of business. In fact, in those States where the tip minimum wage equaled the general minimum wage, we saw a growth in the number of restaurants.

And, furthermore, to respond to another piece of misinformation, waiters and waitresses in these States received more in tips, not less. So the mythology that is going around here is that if we raise the minimum wage for waiters and waitresses, when somebody walks into a restaurant, they are going to be thinking, "Oh, my goodness, this person is making 10, 12 bucks an hour; I am going to leave less of a tip," ain't the way the world works.

Let me also say a word about how the pandemic, which has impacted workers in every sector—but how it has impacted tip workers. In many States where the tip minimum wage still exists, tip workers—and this is rather unbelievable—tip workers did not even

qualify for unemployment. So we are talking now, in this bill, of substantially increasing unemployment—a \$400 supplement—and we are talking about extending it to late August. But tip workers, whose minimum wage is so low, do not even qualify for unemployment.

In an industry where more than 6 million workers have lost their jobs—and, obviously, we all know the restaurant and hotel industry have been terribly hard-hit by the pandemic—more than 60 percent of subminimum wage earners could not get unemployment benefits because the State and Federal Government denied them benefits for not making enough earned income. You all got that?

So we are talking about the need—and I certainly agree with that—to expand and extend unemployment benefits, but you have a whole lot of workers who are earning starvation wages who are not going to be eligible for unemployment.

At the same time, as restaurants reopen, the CDC has declared restaurants as the most dangerous place to work. We all know that. It is obvious. You are coming face-to-face with your customers. And now servers, in the midst of that, are responsible—you are a waiter, you are a waitress, and you are now responsible—for telling somebody who walks into your restaurant that they must socially distance themselves or wear a mask. It is not necessarily a comfortable position for a worker dealing with a hostile customer.

I would also add, as all of us are increasingly aware of sexual harassment in general in this country, that the restaurant industry has some of the highest rates of sexual harassment. In a workplace where 70 percent of the workers are women and where they rely on their customers to determine their wages because of tips, women are often expected to withstand sexual harassment in order to get those tips.

In States where the subminimum wage has been eliminated, sexual harassment has been cut substantially because women no longer have to take that. It is not an all-or-nothing proposition.

If you ask me again what the major economic crisis facing this country is, we know unemployment is sky-high, we know income inequality is unacceptable, and so many other factors are out there about the economy, but at the top of my list is the fact that tens of millions of workers in the richest country on Earth are barely making it. They are having a hard time feeding their kids. They are having a hard time paying their rent. Many of them get inadequate or no health insurance at all.

Now, year after year, the American people—I think, correctly—perceive that this Congress bows to the wishes of the rich and the powerful, gives tax breaks to people who don't need it. We deregulate companies that should be regulated, et cetera, et cetera.

In this moment of economic and health crisis, now is the time for us to

stand with working families, and the most important thing that we can do is to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. This is what Joe Biden believes. This is what the Democratic platform stands for, and this is what at least 38 cosponsors of the Raise the Wage Act also believe.

So here we are at a pivotal moment. The working class is being decimated. People are struggling to feed their kids. We have to raise wages in this country, and we have to raise the wages of tip workers.

I will be back later for more on this. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VAN HOLLEN). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter dated February 22, 2021, about tip wages, signed by hundreds of organizations.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

FEBRUARY 22, 2021.

DEAR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS: The undersigned organizations enthusiastically support the Raise the Wage Act of 2021, as introduced in the Senate by Senators Bernie Sanders (VT) and Patty Murray (WA), and in the House by Representative Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA).

If enacted, the Raise the Wage Act of 2021 would:

Gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025;

After 2025, adjust the minimum wage each year to keep pace with growth in the median wage—a measure of wages for typical workers;

Phase out the egregious subminimum wage for tipped workers, which has been frozen at a meager \$2.13 since 1991; and

Sunset unacceptable subminimum wages for workers with disabilities employed in sheltered workshops and for workers under age 20.

Since fast-food workers in New York City first walked off the job in 2012, demanding a \$15 minimum wage and the right to form a union, workers across the country have completely changed the conversation and politics surrounding the minimum wage. Yet, 20 states still have not raised their minimum wages beyond the paltry \$7.25 federal minimum wage, and many more have only marginally higher minimum wages than the federal floor—despite clearly negative impacts on workers across the country. Those negative impacts also disproportionately affect Black and brown workers, who have historically been segregated into the lowest paying occupations in the U.S., and who are leading the Fight for \$15 and a union.

Congress should heed the demands of workers of color, communities, and their constituents and waste no more time in passing the Raise the Wage Act. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour and eliminating subminimum wages for tipped workers, youth workers, and workers with disabilities is a long overdue, human rights imperative and a critical racial and gender justice issue—one that will make a crucial difference in the lives of millions of workers and in communities across the country.

Gradually raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2025 would lift pay for nearly 32 million workers—21% of the U.S. workforce. Affected workers who work year-round would earn an extra \$3,300 a year—enough to make a tremendous difference in the life of a

cashier, home health aide, or fast-food worker who today struggles to get by on less than \$25,000 a year. A majority (59%) of workers whose total family income is below the poverty line would receive a pay increase if the minimum wage were raised to \$15 by 2025.

Raising the minimum wage to \$15 and eliminating subminimum wages will be particularly significant for workers of color and women workers, who have historically been pushed into the most underpaid paid jobs through occupational segregation. Passing the Raise the Wage Act would help narrow both the racial pay gap and the gender pay gap. Of those whose pay would increase, nearly 6 in 10 (59%) are women and more than a quarter (28%) have children. One-third (31%) of African-American workers and one-quarter (26%) of Latinx workers would get a raise if the federal minimum wage were increased to \$15. Almost one in four (23%) of those people who would benefit is a Black or Latina woman. African-American workers and Latinx workers are paid 10–15% less than white workers with the same characteristics, so the Raise the Wage Act would deliver the largest benefits to Black and Latinx workers—about \$3,500 annually for a year-round worker. The Raise the Wage Act will also deliver increased wages to an estimated 1.45 million LGBTQ workers and would reduce the proportion of male same-sex couples living in poverty by one-third and female same-sex couples by almost one-half. There would be similar reductions in poverty among LGBTQ people who are not in same-sex couple households, with the largest gains for those with the highest rates of poverty—Black, Latinx, bisexual, and transgender adults.

Raising wages has never been more urgent than during this pandemic. Essential and frontline workers make up a majority of those who would benefit from a \$15 minimum wage. Members of Congress should do more than pay lip service to front line workers; they should make sure they get higher wages. The median pay is well under \$15 an hour for many essential and frontline jobs; examples include substitute teachers, nursing assistants, and home health aides. More than one-third (35%) of those working in residential or nursing care facilities would see their pay increase, in addition to home health aides and other health care support workers. One in three retail sector workers (36%) would get a raise, including 42% of workers in grocery stores. More than four-in-ten (43%) of janitors, housekeepers, and other cleaning workers would benefit. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of servers, cooks, and other food preparation workers would see their earnings rise by \$5,800 on a year-round basis. For 6 million tipped food service workers, a majority female workforce, the subminimum wage for tipped workers is a legacy of slavery that has been a source of poverty, sexual harassment, and exposure to health risks and hostile customers during the pandemic. Ten million workers in health care, education, construction, and manufacturing would see a raise—representing nearly one-third (31%) of the workers who would see a raise.

Contrary to what opponents of a living wage would argue, our economy can more than afford a \$15 minimum wage. Workers earning the current federal minimum wage are paid less per hour in real dollars than their counterparts were paid 50 years ago. Businesses can afford to pay the most underpaid worker in the U.S. today substantially more than what her counterpart was paid half a century ago. The economy has grown dramatically over the past 50 years, and workers are producing more from each hour of work, with productivity nearly doubling since the late 1960s. If the minimum wage

had been raised at the same pace as productivity growth since the late 1960s, it would be over \$20 an hour today.

In fact, an immediate increase in the minimum wage is necessary for the health of our economy. A \$15 minimum wage by 2025 would generate \$107 billion in higher wages for workers and would also benefit communities across the country. Because underpaid workers spend much of their extra earnings, this injection of wages will help stimulate the economy and spur greater business activity and job growth.

It is long past time to pass the Raise the Wage Act of 2021—and we call on all Members of Congress to finally give nearly 32 million workers the raise they have fought so hard to secure.

A Better Balance; Action Center on Race & the Economy; Adelante Alabama Worker Center; Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE); Advocates for Better Children's Diets; Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.; AFL-CIO; AIDS Alabama; Alabama Arise; Alameda County Community Food Bank; Alianza Nacional de Campesinas; Amara Legal Center; American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC); American Association of University Women (AAUW); American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); American Public Health Association; Americans for Democratic Action (ADA); Americans for Tax Fairness; AnitaB.org; Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO.

Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence; Asset Funders Network; Autistic Self Advocacy Network; Be A Hero; Bend the Arc Jewish Action; Bet Tzedek Legal Services; Black Visions; Block Builderz; Border Workers United; Bridgeways; Business for a Fair Minimum Wage; Business For Good San Diego; CAAP; California Association of Food Banks; Campaign for America's Future; Caring Across Generations; CASA; Casa de Esperanza; National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities; Center for American Progress; Center for Disability Rights.

Center for Economic and Policy Research; Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research; Center for Popular Democracy; Center for Public Representation; Center for Workers' Rights; Center on Policy Initiatives; Centro de los Derechos del Migrante; Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL); Centro Legal de la Raza; Change Machine; Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy; Chicago Foundation for Women; Child Care Aware® of America; Children's Defense Fund; Civic Ventures; Clean Up the River Environment (CURE); Clearinghouse on Women's Issues; Coalition for Labor Union Women, San Francisco; Coalition of Labor Union Women.

Coalition on Human Needs; Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking; Communications Workers of America (CWA); Community Enabler Developer, Inc.; Community Legal Services, Philadelphia; Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)/POWER-PAC IL; Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces; Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF); CRLA Foundation; DC Dorothy Day Catholic Worker; Demos; Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services; Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project; Economic Opportunity Institute; Economic Policy Institute; Encuentro; Endangered Species Coalition; Equal Justice Center; Equal Pay Today; Equal Rights Advocates.

Equality Labs; Equity Advocates; Etowah County Women's Democratic Club; Etowah Democrats Club; Every Texan; Fair Work Center; Family Equality; Farmworker Asso-

ciation of Florida; Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin; Feeding Texas; Fight for \$15 and a Union; First Focus Campaign for Children; Florida Policy Institute; Food Bank of Northern Nevada; Food Chain Workers Alliance; Food for People; Food Research & Action Center (FRAC); For Our Future Action Fund; Freedom Network USA; Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Fund for Community Reparations for Autistic People of Color's Interdependence, Survival, & Empowerment; Futures Without Violence Gender Justice; Georgetown Law Center; Granite State Interfaith Action Fund; Granite State Organizing Project; Groundwork Action; Hawaii Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice; Hawaii Children's Action Network Speaks!; HBCU Collective; Hispanic Federation; Hometown Action; Hunger Solutions Minnesota; Hunger Task Force; ICNA Council for Social Justice; Illinois Hunger Coalition; In The Public Interest; Indiana Institute for Working Families; Indivisible; Island Empire Labor Council AFL-CIO.

Institute for Women's Policy research; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; Islamic Relief USA; Islamophobia Studies Center; Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee; Just Economics of Western North Carolina; Justice at Work; Justice at Work (PA); Justice for Migrant Women; Juvenile Law Center; Kentucky Center for Economic Policy; Kentucky Equal Justice Center; Labor Council for Latin American Advancement; Lambda Legal; Land Stewardship Project; LatinoLEAD; The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; Legal Aid at Work; Legal Aid Justice Center; Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia.

Legal Momentum, the Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund; Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA); Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy; Louisiana Budget Project; Macomb Immigrant Service Center; Maine People's Alliance; MANA, A National Latina Organization; Maryland Hunger Solutions; Massachusetts Employment Lawyers Association; Massachusetts Law Reform Institute; Meriden Congregational Church, UCC; Michigan Immigrant Rights Center; Michigan League for Public Policy; Michigan United; Milwaukee Area Service & Hospitality Workers Organization; Minnesota Voice; Mississippi National Organization for Women; Missouri Faith Voices; Missouri Jobs with Justice; MomsRising.

Mothers Outreach Network; Muslim Advocates; NALC; National Action Network; National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities; National Association of Social Workers; National Black Justice Coalition; National CAPACD-National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development; National Center for Law and Economic Justice; National Center for Lesbian Rights; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence; National Coalition for the Homeless; National Council for Occupational Safety and Health; National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC); National Council of Jewish Women; National Council on Aging; National Disabled Law Students Association; National Disability Rights Network (NDRN).

National Domestic Violence Resource Center; National Domestic Workers Alliance; National Employment Law Project; National Employment Lawyers Association; National Employment Lawyers Association—Eastern Pennsylvania; National Equality Action Team (NEAT); National Farm to School Network; National Health Care for the Homeless Council; National Network to End Domestic Violence; National Organization for Women; National Partnership for Women & Families; National WIC Association; National Women's

Health Network; National Women's Law Center; Native Women Lead; NC-NELA (North Carolina National Employment Law Project); Network for Victim Recovery DC; NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice; New Earth; New Georgia Project.

New Hampshire Youth Movement; New Haven Legal Assistance Association; New Mexico Center on Law and Policy; New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice; North Carolina Justice Center; Northwest Harvest; Northwest Workers' Justice Project; Oasis Legal Services; Ohio Organizing Collaborative; Oklahoma Policy Institute; One Fair Wage; One Fair Wage Action; One Pennsylvania; Operation Food Search; Our Revolution; Oxfam America; Parent Voices CA; Partnership for America's Children; Pathways for Prosperity Coalition; Fayetteville, NC; Patriotic Millionaires.

Pennsylvania AFL-CIO; People For the American Way; People's Action; People's Parity Project; Philadelphia Drivers' Union; Physicians for Reproductive Health; Policy Matters Ohio; Polygon Education Fund; Power Coalition for Equity and Justice; Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative; Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada; Prosperity Now; Public Citizen; Public Justice Center; RAISE High Road Restaurants; Raise the Wage PA; Reframe Health and Justice; Restaurant Opportunities Center of DC; Restaurant Opportunities Centers United; RESULTS DC/MD.

Results for America; Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment (RISE); Rights & Democracy NH; Rights & Democracy VT; River Valley Organizing; ROC-Chicago; ROC-Minnesota; ROC-New York; ROC-Pennsylvania; San Francisco-Marín Food Bank; Saverlife; Sciencecorps; SEIU Wisconsin State Council; Service Employees International Union; Shriver Center on Poverty Law; Sierra Club; Social Justice Associates of South Church, Portsmouth NH; Southwest Detroit Immigrant and Refugee Center; Southwest Women's Law Center; Step Up Louisiana.

TakeAction Minnesota; Tax March; Temp Worker Justice; Terence Crutcher Foundation; The 99% Pennsylvania campaign; The AIDS Institute; The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis; The Employee Rights Advocacy Institute For Law & Policy (The Institute); The International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW);

The Legal Aid Society; The National Domestic Violence Hotline; The New York Womens Foundation; The Partnership for Working Families; The Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center of UMB; The West Side Commons; The Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania; The Women's Building; TIME'S UP Now; Ujima Inc.; The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community; UnidosUS.

Unitarian Universalist Action New Hampshire; Unitarian Universalist Justice PA; United Food and Commercial Workers International Union; United State of Women; United Steelworkers; United Valley Interfaith (UVIP); United Vision for Idaho; URG: Fellowship of Christ Church NYC; URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity; Virginia Poverty Law Center; Voices for Progress; Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs; Washington Wage Claim Project; Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights; West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy; Western Center on Law and Poverty; Western Pennsylvania Employment Lawyers Association.

Wildfire: Igniting Community Action to End Poverty in Arizona; Women Employed; Womenpreneurs; Women's Fund of Rhode Is-

land; Women's Institute for Secure Retirement; Women's Law Project; WOMEN'S WAY; Worker Justice Center of New York; Workers Defense Action Fund; Working Families Party; Working Washington; Workplace Fairness; Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic; Worksafe; Young Invincibles; YWCA USA; ZERO TO THREE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina is recognized.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I will try to be relatively brief here. I understand the bill is being printed now, and we will have a vote here fairly shortly.

I just want to set the stage for my view—my point of view. I think I speak for most people in our conference on what we are trying to do here.

Up until now, we have been able, as a body, to work together on COVID relief. And the question is, Why can't we do it again? I think I know the answer, but I want to remind people what we have done in a bipartisan fashion.

On March 5, 2020, when we had President Trump, a Republican Senate, and a Democratic House, we approved \$8 billion, 96 to 1, and we were just beginning to understand the virus; March 18, a few weeks later, \$355 billion, 90 to 8; March 25, \$1.9 trillion, 96 to 0.

So from March 5 to March 25, we passed three bills, well over \$2 trillion, 96 to 1, 90 to 8, and 96 to 0. So I would argue to the American people that it is not like the Republican Party and the Democratic Party can't work together when it comes to COVID relief.

But now that the Democrats have the House, the Senate, and the White House, there seems to be no desire to go down that road, and I will talk about that in a minute.

April 21, 2020, we did \$355 billion more. That was by voice vote. Spending \$355 by voice vote is pretty astonishing; \$1.9 trillion, 96 to 0 is pretty astonishing. September 30, 2020, 84 to 10. December 21, just a few months ago, we spent another trillion, 92 to 6.

Why do I bring this up? I bring it up to show there is plenty of bipartisanship around COVID relief, and that bipartisanship has stopped. President Biden made a big deal about wanting to bring the country together and find common ground. In the one area that we actually had common ground, we have abandoned common ground to deal with a \$1.9 trillion package just months after we authorized \$1.04 trillion.

Here is the problem I think Republicans have. Of the \$1.9 trillion being proposed now, about 90 percent of it has very little to do with COVID. It is a liberal wish list. The reason I know it is a liberal wish list is that Senator SCHUMER said 15 times yesterday—about 15 times—that it wasn't a liberal wish list. If Senator SCHUMER is saying it is not a liberal wish list, it is a liberal wish list. I will be able to prove that in more detail.

That is the history of bipartisanship. That bipartisanship has been de-

stroyed. We had 10 Republicans, I think, go to the White House to offer around \$700 billion that would extend checks, that would do vaccines, would do a lot of things that we think we need to still do, but that went nowhere.

Another point for the American people: We are going to a partisan approach to COVID for the first time. I went over the amount of money we have appropriated to the COVID problems the country has experienced, and here is what I want you to understand. We are going to spend \$1.9 trillion in a partisan fashion. I think a lot of it is very much unrelated to COVID simply because they have the power to do it.

They now have the power of the Federal Government, complete power—control of the Senate, control of the House, control of the White House. They have abandoned bipartisanship. We had the Presidency and the Senate; they had the House. We were able to work together. Now they have it all. They are running us over, literally, legislatively here.

I think we have made reasonable offers. Nobody is willing to compromise. They see this as a moment to do a lot of things they have been wanting to do for years that have nothing to do with COVID.

Another problem they have, in my view, is you are appropriating \$1.9 trillion, most of it not related to COVID, and we haven't spent the money we have allocated in the past. So administrative actions—there is still \$200 billion that we haven't spent. Legislative actions, \$3.1 trillion we have spent. We have appropriated \$4.1 trillion. There is still \$1 trillion that hasn't been spent yet.

The Federal Reserve actions allowed \$5.9 trillion to be allocated to help businesses that were failing. They spent \$2.8 trillion.

The vaccine is getting out by the day. We are hopeful that we can change the course of the virus, get people back to work.

In this bill, they do a lot of things unrelated to COVID because they can. Why are we opposed to this? Because it is a lot of money that is being spent on things unrelated to COVID. We haven't spent the money we appropriated in past efforts yet, but we are going to spend \$1.9 trillion more. I think it is very unfortunate, and I hope the American people understand that this is spending money for the sake of spending money, not to combat COVID.

Let me give you some examples of what is in this bill. The minimum wage dropped out. Now is the worst possible time, I think, to go to \$15-an-hour minimum wage. Just think about your own communities. How many restaurants and hotels have had to reduce or close down because of COVID restrictions? We are finally beginning to come out of it a bit. To add a \$15-an-hour mandate, doubling the minimum wage, would be increasing the cost of doing business after the government at the State and local levels shut the businesses down.